

MTB World Cup XC #6 & DH #4 - CDM

Mont Sainte Anne, Canada, July 25-27, 2008

Race 5 - July 26: Elite men downhill

Minnaar speeds to closely contested victory

By Sue George in Mont-Sainte-Anne, Québec – *cyclingnews.com*

Greg Minnaar is now two for two in the recent World Cups. After winning in Fort William, Minnaar doubled up with a win in Mont-Sainte-Anne. As the last man down the mountain, he dropped nine seconds off his qualifying time and took over the lead from second-fastest qualifier Sam Hill (Monster Energy) and third fastest qualifier and world champion Gee Atherton (Animal Commencal).

"Coming from last year, I knew I had a chance. It was a confidence thing," said Minnaar, who also won in 2001. "Last year, if my shoulder hadn't come out [dislocated during the run, yet he still finished second - ed.]. I would have had a much better chance of winning."

In between the semi-finals and the finals, Minnaar tweaked his suspension settings. "I souped up my fork so it was better on the small bumps. It made a difference - giving me more traction up front."

"I didn't have a clean run; it was a bit loose now and then, and I still made a few mistakes like I did on the earlier run" said Minnaar. "I don't think anyone can have a clean run in downhill racing. If they say they do, I think they're lying," he laughed.

Minnaar said he didn't know what time he had to beat. "I don't like knowing the times. I think it'd just play in my head the whole time and the downhill is so psychological that you don't want to be thinking about something else or you're not riding fast. I'd rather just focus on my race and if I can do it, I'll do it, if I can't, I won't."

Minnaar's run clearly made him feel better after what was a disappointing World Championship for him last month. "You can't do well every weekend and those things happen. I'm stoked to be back up riding and my confidence is back up. [Team-mate] Steve [Peat] has been giving me pointers and riding with me this week. I think all of us push each other the whole time."



Greg Minnaar (Santa Cruz Syncicate)
Photo ©: Dave McElwaine



Sam Hill (Monster Energy) soaring through
Photo ©: Dave McElwaine

Minnaar's run came long after some of the men started their final run. The first time to stick at the top of the leaderboard was the second man off, Nico Vink (Dolphin Trek MTB), with a 4:55.70.

Next up in the hot seat was Luke Strobel (Team Maxxis) with a 4:55.02. The 22 year-old American was happy to be back in competition. "My run wasn't so good, but it's my first race back after a wrist injury. I broke my scaphoid at Sea Otter, and I've been out since April. I'm having a lot of fun being back."

Florent Payet (Subaru Mountain Bike Pro) ousted Strobel from the hot seat with a time of 4:50.21. The French racer passed the honor to Matti Lehtikainen (MS Intense Factory Racing), who clocked a 4:48.67.

Next up with the then-fastest time was Mitchell Delfs (Kenda Tomac) at 4:47.15. He stayed while 20 racers finished, none of them able to surpass him.

Young American Aaron Holmes Gwin (Yeti Fox Shox Factory Racing) became the surprise of the day when he landed in the hotseat with a 4:42.65.. The 20 year-old from California was making his first appearance racing at a World Cup. In fact, it was his first race internationally and his race was good enough for 10th place.

"I got tired in qualifying, and I wanted to ride faster in the finals," said Gwin. "I wanted to keep it smooth and I did that for the most part except for one mistake, but it didn't end up costing me too much."

Gwin held the honor of leading for another six racers. That's when sixth fastest qualifier Fabien Barel (Subaru Mountain Bike Pro) clocked a 4:37.25.

"I pushed hard and took risks. The track was so rough, but it's the same for everyone," said Barel. "If you lose a couple seconds on a few sections, then you're behind. I gave my best though." Barel had recovered from a collision with a slower racer merging back onto the course after taking an alternate line last weekend at the French National Championships. His injured ankle had swelled up after the incident, but finally felt good enough for riding late this week - just in time for him to still get some practice time before competing. "I don't feel the pain when I race although it's painful now," he said after his first run of the day.



World Downhill Champion Gee Atherton (Animal Commencal)
Photo ©: Dave McElwaine

After Barel, only five more racers remained out on course, yet the lead would change hands four more times. First up was Steve Peat (Santa Cruz Syndicate) in 4:33.53, then Gee Atherton in 4:32.83, then Hill in 4:32.30, and lastly Minnaar in 4:30.57. On Chris Kovarik (Chain Reaction Cycle), who had qualified fourth, failed to set a new best time.

"I just made a little mistake in the high speed sections," said Peat, who was crowned British National Downhill Champion last weekend. "I blew the following rut, and I was pissed off at myself for making that mistake - especially when the top four times are so close. I knew I rode most of the run pretty well, but those three guys that beat me are all on it this year and you never know until they get down."



Steve Peat (Santa Cruz Syndicate)
Photo ©: Dave McElwaine

"I tried to hit all my lines and not over-ride some sections," said Hill. "Overall it was pretty good." After a crash at the World Championship cost Hill a win despite a six second advantage beforehand, Hill said, "It was a safe run - I wanted to make it down without crashing. I wanted to make sure I didn't get a flat. I'm pleased to get second - it's good points for the series."

Looking back at worlds, Hill said, "I think it was one of those things and I got unlucky on that turn. I know everyone says I could have slowed down, but if someone had told me I was up by six seconds I probably wouldn't have slowed down. I was just unlucky really."

Third placed Atherton said, "It's a track where you really need to hold on to the bike. Nearly every run this weekend, the course has changed - whether it was getting wetter and rougher or drying out like this afternoon. Every time it dried out a little more, you could hit something a little faster. It kept the race exciting."

It was exciting with Minnaar winning by less than two seconds and Hill and Atherton separated by just 0.53 seconds in the next two spots. Atherton summed up the level of competition that has kept the top men pushing each other at every event and left no clear dominant racer. "Given the standard of the World Cup riders these days, you have to aim for a perfect run."

Results

1	Greg Minnaar (RSA) Santa Cruz Syndicate	4.30.57
2	Samuel Hill (Aus) Monster Energy / Iron Horse	0.01.73
3	Gee Atherton (GBr) Animal Commencal	0.02.23
4	Steve Peat (GBr) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0.02.93
5	Fabien Barel (Fra) Subaru Mountain Bike Pro Team	0.06.73
6	Samuel Blenkinsop (NZl) Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	0.07.73
7	Nathan Rennie (Aus) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0.09.53
8	Julien Camellini (Fra) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0.11.13
9	Justin Leov (NZl) Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	0.11.83
10	Aaron Holmes Gwin (USA) Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	0.12.13
11	Chris Kovarik (Aus) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0.12.73
12	Brendan Fairclough (GBr) Monster Energy / Iron Horse	0.13.23
13	Marc Beaumont (GBr) Team Bike Radar	0.15.23
14	Mitchell Delfs (Aus) Kenda Tomac	0.16.63
15	Josh Bryceland (GBr) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0.17.53
16	Matti Lehtikainen (Fin) Ms-Intense Factory-Racing	0.18.13
17	Fabien Pedemanaud (Fra) Team Pyrenees Morewood	
18	Nathan Rankin (NZl) Playbiker - Iron Horse	0.18.83
19	Nick Beer (Swi) Ixs Sports Division Racing Team	
20	Pasqual Canals Flix (Spa) Massi	
21	Florent Payet (Fra) Subaru Mountain Bike Pro Team	0.19.63
22	Thibaut Ruffin (Fra)	0.20.83
23	Dan Atherton (GBr) Animal Commencal	0.20.93
24	Oscar Saiz Castane (Spa) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0.21.93
25	Amiel Cavalier (Aus) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0.22.53
26	Ben Reid (Irl)	0.22.73
27	Cameron Cole (NZl) Team Maxxis	0.22.83
28	Joris Bigoni (Fra)	0.22.93
29	Duncan Riffle (USA) Cannondale Factory Racing	0.23.03
30	Jared Rando (Aus) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0.23.53
31	Ben Cathro (GBr)	0.23.63
32	Ryan Condrashoff (USA)	0.24.33
33	Luke Strobels (USA) Team Maxxis	0.24.43
34	Kieran Bennett (NZl)	0.24.73
35	Toni Berg (Fin)	
36	Samuel Zbinden (Swi)	0.25.03
37	Nico Vink (Bel)	0.25.13
38	Andrew Neethling (RSA)	0.25.43
39	Alan Beggin (Ita)	
39	Cody Warren (USA)	
41	Ralph Jones (GBr)	0.26.13
42	Danny Hart (GBr)	0.27.13
43	Markus Pekoll (Aut)	0.28.63
44	Dominik Gspan (Swi)	0.28.83
45	Claudio Caluori (Swi)	0.28.93
46	Joshua Button (Aus)	0.29.23
47	Lars Peyer (Swi) Suspension Center	0.29.33
48	Antonio Ferreira Pajuelo (Spa) Massi	0.29.43
49	Chris Hutchens (GBr)	0.29.63
50	Daniel Critchlow (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0.29.83
51	Kyle Strait (USA)	0.29.93
52	Fabien Cousinie (Fra)	0.30.13
53	Adam Brayton (GBr) Playbiker - Iron Horse	0.30.43
54	Joseph Smith (GBr)	
55	Justin Brown (Can)	0.30.53
56	Markolf Berchtold (Bra)	0.30.63
57	Will Longden (GBr) Team Bike Radar	
58	Markus Schwab (Swi)	0.31.23
59	Charles-Alexandre Dube (Can)	0.32.03
60	Thomas Braithwaite (GBr)	0.32.13
61	Maxime Remy (Fra)	0.32.23
62	Ruaridh Cunningham (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0.33.93
63	Tim Eaton (Aus)	0.34.43
64	Jason Memmelaar (USA)	0.34.73

65 Ben Ineson (GBr)	0.34.93
66 Mathieu Troquier (Fra)	0.35.23
67 Will Rischbieth (Aus)	0.35.43
68 Arnaud Delente (Fra)	0.35.83
69 Bradley Benedict (USA)	0.37.63
70 Boris Tetzlaff (Aut)	0.38.63
71 Geritt Beytagh (USA)	0.42.13
72 Derrick Nobman (USA)	0.43.63
73 Drew Pautler (Can)	0.44.83
74 Jamie Biluk (Can)	0.46.53
75 Steve Smith (Can)	0.52.63
76 Damien Spagnolo (Fra) Subaru Mountain Bike Pro Team	1.02.03
77 John Swanguen (USA) Ms-Intense Factory-Racing	1.38.83
78 Matthew Simmonds (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	2.08.13
79 Lorenzo Suding (Ita) Playbiker - Iron Horse	4.45.53
80 Michael Skinner (NZl) Playbiker - Iron Horse	5.50.83

Team (includes men, women and juniors)

1 Santa Cruz Syndicate	110 pts
2 Animal Commencal	80
3 Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	69
4 Monster Energy / Iron Horse	54
5 MS-Intense Factory-Racing	45
6 Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	43
7 Team Maxxis	39
8 Subaru Mountain Bike Pro Team	38
9 Suspension Center	33
10 Kona	32
11 Norco World Team	28
12 Playbiker - Iron Horse	26
13 4 Elements Yeti/Hotec/Rsp	23
14 Team Bike Radar	18
15 Kenda Tomac	17
16 Team Pyrenees Morewood	14
17 Giant Mountain Bike Team	14
18 Ixs Sports Division Racing Team	12
19 Massi	11
20 Cannondale Factory Racing	2